

## This Day in History... February 2, 1971

### Convention on Wetlands

On February 2, 1971, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat, also known as the Convention on Wetlands, was signed in Ramsar, Iran.

The idea for the convention was first raised in the 1960s. At the time, there were growing concerns that the continued destruction of wetlands would have an irreversible effect on people and animals, particularly waterbirds. Wetlands play an important role in nature and are an important habitat for several species of wildlife. The wetlands are also an efficient natural system that filters pollutants from the water, absorbs excess nutrients, and reduces flooding.



*Similar to the stamp above but with 9.8 vertically die cut perforations.*

To address these concerns, Eskandar Firouz, Luc Hoffmann and Geoffrey Matthews developed the idea of the Ramsar Convention – to encourage international cooperation in the protection and management of wetlands around the world. Representatives from seven nations met in Ramsar, Iran on February 2, 1971 to discuss and approve the convention, which went into effect on December 21, 1975. The seven initial participating countries were Australia, Finland, Greece, Iran, Norway, South Africa, and Sweden. In the years to come, the convention grew to over 170 countries, including the United States. They all meet every three years as the Conference of the Contracting Parties to oversee the current wetlands projects and suggest any possible improvements.

The primary goal of the convention is to “stem the progressive encroachment on and loss of wetlands now and in the future.” Further, all the signing parties agreed that “the conservation of wetlands and their flora and fauna can be ensured by combining far-sighted national policies with coordinated international action.”

All signatories of the convention pledge to commit to the proper use of wetlands and to designate and manage Wetlands of International Importance (also known as Ramsar sites). They agree to fully cooperate with other nations concerning shared wetlands and migratory waterbirds.

To date, there are over 2,400 Ramsar sites around the world, spanning over 810,000 square miles. The United Kingdom has the most sites, at 175, followed by Mexico, with 142. The US currently has 41 sites covering 7,276 square miles. To commemorate the convention and promote awareness of the plight of the wetlands, World Wetlands Day was established on February 2, 1997. Every year on this day, communities come together to celebrate, protect, and educate each other about the importance of wetlands for both humans and nature.



*1998 5¢ non-profit rate, non-denominated coil stamp perforated 10 vertically*



*This stamp was issued in 1984 for the 50th anniversary of the first Duck stamps, which raise money for wetlands conservation.*

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